

GREAT LAKES/ATLANTIC REGION

BIG RIVERS INITIATIVE

★ **CASPER BLUFF PRESERVE EXPANDED, CONVERTED TO NATIVE PRAIRIE**

The final 24 acres of Casper Bluff Preserve, located near the Upper Mississippi River NWR, was acquired in September 2022 by DU and the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDFC). JDFC has been restoring the 170-acre preserve to bluff-top prairie and oak-savanna habitats. They are also protecting rare Native American effigy mounds. The acquisition and restoration are facilitated by a portion of a \$1 million North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) grant to protect, restore, and enhance over 1,600 acres of wetlands and uplands on public and private land. In addition to providing breeding habitat for mallards, blue-winged teal, and wood ducks, numerous species of migratory birds have also been documented using Casper Bluff.



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★ **RICE LAKE SFWA WATER STRUCTURES IMPROVE WETLAND MANAGEMENT**

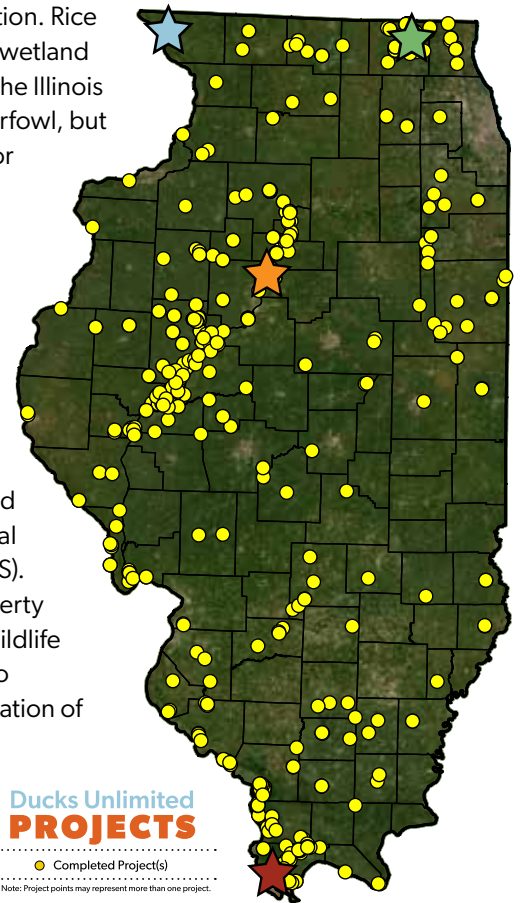
Before the start of the 2022 duck season, DU and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) replaced a \$161,000 water control structure at the Copperas Creek Unit of Rice Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area. Funding was provided by NAWCA and the IDNR's state habitat stamp. The structure's pump had become inoperable, which made it difficult for site managers to properly control water levels and optimize wetland habitat. With the new water structure in place, managers can control the flow of water into and out of Rice Lake to promote moist-soil plant production. Rice Lake consists of 7,100 acres of backwater lakes, wetland impoundments, and bottomland forests along the Illinois River. It is a primary stopover for migrating waterfowl, but



also supports a variety of shorebirds and fish species. The site is a popular destination for duck hunters, featuring stakes for permanent blind builds as well as walk-in access.

★ **ACQUISITION PROJECT CONNECTS STATE AND FEDERAL REFUGES**

With funding from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and Friends of the Cache River Watershed, Ducks Unlimited (DU) acquired a 63-acre parcel in March 2022 that connects two important public land areas in southern Illinois. The acquisition is wedged between the 10,000-acre Horseshoe Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area and 17,000-acre Cypress Creek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), establishing a continuous expanse of permanently protected bottomland where the Cache River empties into the Mississippi River. Funding to restore the land to bottomland forest has been provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Once the work is completed, the property will be transferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) and incorporated into Cypress Creek NWR. DU began restoration of the parcel in September 2022, excavating over 12,000-cubic yards of dirt to recreate a slough that had been leveled and filled.



★ IMPROVING MALLARD HABITAT IN THE CHICAGO WILDERNESS

The Great Lakes Mallards NAWCA project is a coordinated effort to protect, restore, and enhance wetlands and grasslands on public and private lands across 115 counties in Illinois, Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan. The primary purpose is conserving mallard breeding and nesting habitat. Mallard populations in the Great Lakes have exhibited a recent decline (about 16 to 17 percent drop according to Dr. John Coluccy, DU's Director of Conservation Planning for the Great Lakes and Atlantic Region). Estimates indicate their current population is below the long-term average. DU's goal is to conserve 1,900 acres of breeding, nesting, and brood rearing habitat for mallards and other waterfowl. Funding has been provided by a \$1 million NAWCA grant and an additional \$2,516,628 in matching funds.



In Illinois, DU is partnering with the USFWS at Hackmatack NWR and the Forest Preserve District of Kane County at their Burlington Prairie Preserve to complete projects that benefit breeding mallards in northeast Illinois. At Hackmatack NWR, DU and its habitat partner Openlands, restored a

total of 176 acres of fallow agricultural fields at three different sites. Wetlands were restored by breaking drainage tiles, excavating shallow basins, and constructing low level berms. Upland habitats were restored and enhanced using various management tools like prescribed burns, herbicide application, invasive species treatment, forest stand improvements, and native prairie seeding. Similarly, 111 acres of native prairie and pothole wetlands are being restored at Burlington Prairie in Kane County. Additionally, the USFWS' Partners for Fish & Wildlife Program is using grant funding to work with private landowners interested in restoring habitat to build complexes around both areas that will, over time, resemble the pre-settlement eastern tallgrass prairie and pothole wetlands that once stretched across the Midwest.



Jaakko Kemppainen - Unsplash



Ducks Unlimited conserves, restores, and manages wetlands and associated habitats for North America's waterfowl. These habitats also benefit other wildlife and people.

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ILLINOIS NUMBERS 2022

- 6,148 acres conserved
- \$1,873,853 invested

HISTORICAL

- 73,485 acres conserved
- \$25,393,944 invested



GREAT LAKES & ATLANTIC REGION

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